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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: BI-WEEKLY REPORT SEPTEMBER 29 2006

¶1. The following reports compiled over the last two weeks illustrate the variety of economic, political, and social developments occurring in Ethiopia.

POLITICAL

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#### Kidnapped Red Cross Workers Released

¶1. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported September 24 that two of its staff kidnapped by the United Western Somali Liberation Front rebel group near the town of Gode in Ethiopia's southeastern Ogaden region had been released. ICRC said the two had been released unharmed and without condition. The rebel group claimed to be fighting for the rights of ethnic Somalis in western Somalia and eastern Ethiopia and warned foreign energy firms against operating in the Somali region. ICRC resumed operations after the kidnappings had prompted a temporary suspension of activities in the region.

#### 3.3 Million Year-Old Toddler Discovered in Ethiopia

¶2. The skeleton of a three year-old girl who died 3.3 million years ago was discovered in the northeastern Ethiopian region of Afar and is said to be the most complete skeleton of the juvenile human ancestor Australopithecus Afarensis ever found. According to experts, the skeletons completeness, antiquity, and age at death combine to make this finding unprecedented in the history of paleoanthropology, and opens new research avenues to investigate the childhood of early human ancestors. Discovered in an area called Dikika, the fossil of the child, named Selam by her discoverers, belongs to the same family best know for the adult skeleton nicknamed Lucy.

#### EPRDF to Convene Conference Focusing on Development and Good Governance

¶3. The EPRDF convened its sixth regular conference September 24 aiming to address good governance and development issues at the national level. Conference Organizing Committee Chairman Taddese Kassa said that good governance was chosen as one of the conference's topics as it is the basis for rapid development and creation of democratic order. Representatives from academia, business as well as the African National Congress, the Communist Party of China, Rwanda, from Yemen, Uganda and Sudan also attended the conference as observers.

#### Bereket Simon Declines Party Spot

¶4. Head of the Political Department of the EPRDF Bereket Simon declined to continue on as chairman of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) citing the need for "new blood" to take over. The former Minister of Information served as ANDM deputy chairman for nearly seven years and has been a member since the party's inception 26 years ago. Bereket currently holds the position of Media Advisor to the

Prime Minister.

#### Business Executives for National Security (BENS) Visits October 12-13

¶5. At the request of Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa Commander RADM Richard Hunt, business leaders from BENS will visit Ethiopia October 12-13 to familiarize themselves with U.S. military training operations and meet with GOE officials and business leaders.

#### ECONOMIC

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#### \$20 Million Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program Launched

¶6. USAID and its contractor, Fintrac, launched a \$20 million agribusiness and trade expansion program on September 19. More than 400 representatives from the business, farming, sectoral, government and donor communities attended. In the first three years, this project will support four key sectors -- coffee, horticulture/floriculture, oilseeds/pulses, hides/skins/leather products -- to increase sales and exports by \$450 million in national, regional, and international markets.

#### Accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO)

¶7. The first national seminar for phyto-sanitary and sanitary measures was held in Ethiopia with a WTO expert leading the workshops. More than 50 participants from the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development, Trade and Industry, and Health were trained on WTO accession rules and sample national standards and certification.

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#### Ethiopian Airlines Rated Africa's Best

¶8. Ethiopian Airlines was named African Airline of the Year by the African Aviation Journal. According to the journal, Ethiopian won due to its financial performance, profitability, passenger growth, route network expansion, fleet modernization, inflight services and overall customer care. Ethiopian Chief Executive Officer Girma Wake received the award in South Africa from Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs Susan McDernoff.

#### DEVELOPMENT

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#### Ambassador Signs Small Grants for FY06

¶9. The mission's small projects program held its annual signing ceremony for FY06 recipients of the Ambassador's special self-help and democracy and human rights grants. Ambassador Huddleston authorized 11 projects totaling \$155,000 for communities in each of Ethiopia's 11 administrative regions. Among the projects made possible by this year's grants were initiatives to provide potable water for a school and surrounding community in the Oromiya region, to produce a nationwide radio program that raises awareness of issues facing disabled persons, and to establish a telephone hotline through which women in Addis Ababa can obtain legal assistance against abuse and discrimination.

#### USAID Works to Improve Distribution of Health Commodities

¶10. On September 25, USAID Mission Director and representatives from the Amhara Regional Health Bureau and Regional Council inaugurated renovations to the Central Warehouse for health commodities in Bahir Dar. This intervention will help essential health products flow efficiently through the warehouse and improve the supply and distribution of health commodities to service delivery

points. Ultimately, it will help the logistics system to fulfill the "six rights" of logistics management: to ensure that the right products are available in the right quantities, in the right condition are delivered to the right place, at the right time, for the right cost.

#### Acute Watery Diarrhea

¶11. The GOE reports that the number of cases of AWD has risen to 20,900, including 199 deaths. AWD continues to be of concern in 61 woredas, not including the Somali Region, where there are unconfirmed reports of the disease. To date USAID has provided \$50,000 and \$48,800 to the SNNPR and Oromiya, respectively, regional health bureaus for logistics and procurement of water purification products. There are unconfirmed reports that the National Laboratory confirmed that the causative agent for AWD is *vibrio cholera* subtype ¶01. However, neither the government nor WHO has declared a cholera emergency in Ethiopia.

#### ENVIRONMENT

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#### U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Technical Assistance to Ethiopia

¶12. Two U.S. Forest Service experts will visit Ethiopia in mid-October to provide technical assistance to the Amhara and Tigray water bureaus as a component of the broader ongoing Integrated Water Resource Management project. The USFS technical assistance will focus on improving the capacity of the water bureaus to monitor watershed conditions and implement management interventions to address water quality and quantity issues.

#### CONSULAR

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#### Diversity Visa Allocation Met

¶13. Ethiopia reached its allocated 3,500 diversity visas September 22 for FY2006. Post's DV2008 campaign, which will provide application instructions and general information, will begin October 2.  
HUDDLESTON